

Ever thought of getting away to the snow for a camping trip this winter? It's not all cold nights and frozen toothpaste in the morning. With a little preparation ahead of time, a snow camping trip can be full of fun. Whether you're into snow-play, hiking or a good yarn by a cozy campfire with your mates at night – here are some tips for your next weekend getaway to the High Country this winter.



*Looking out across the Victorian Alps towards Mount Feathertop.*

## Getting your car ready

Driving through the alpine regions in winter means your car will be subjected to very cold temperatures and icy conditions. Making sure you are well equipped and that everything is running smoothly ensures there's less chance of problems when on the road.

### Mechanics

Have your mechanic check everything is working properly before you leave, particularly:

- The battery can crank start in cold conditions.
- The radiator coolant is topped up and contains an antifreeze mix.
- Your tyres have good tread.

### Snow Chains

Hire or purchase a set of snow chains. These can feel a bit intimidating, but the store will normally do a 'test fit' on your vehicle before you drive away. This will ensure you have the right size for your tyres.

- Be sure to take note of the steps when they put them on.
- Have a go of fitting and removing the chains yourself when you get home, so you are familiar before your trip.
- Pack waterproof gloves (that can get muddy), a small tarp to kneel on, a head torch, a high-vis vest, and perhaps an old rain jacket that can also get muddy. Keep these in easy reach for when you need to fit your chains.
- There are multiple chain bay sites as you head up the mountains where you can pull in and fit your snow chains.
- When conditions are particularly hazardous, additional LED signs warn that chains must be fitted beyond this point.
- For those hiring chains and not returning the same way, the companies usually have drop-off points at alternate sides of the mountain.



*Chains must be carried during winter.*

Please note Victoria and NSW have slightly different rules on snow chains.

- In Victoria all vehicles must carry chains when entering alpine resorts.

- In NSW only 2WD vehicles must carry chains when entering Kosciuszko National Park, with AWD and 4WD vehicles recommended to carry them.



*Fitting chains early before the weather turns.*

## Fuel

Do you have a diesel car? Regular diesel fuel 'waxes' at low temperatures, which causes blockages in the fuel system.

- *Alpine diesel* is sold at petrol stations near the snowfields during winter. This type of diesel contains an additive to ensure the fuel remains liquid through your fuel system when it gets really cold.
- When planning a trip, aim to run down your tank of regular diesel on the way there.
- Then top up with alpine diesel at a nearby township such as Bright in Victoria or Jindabyne in NSW. This will ensure your tank is full of the alpine blend for your trip into the mountains.
- Allow enough driving for the alpine blend to run through the fuel system before you turn the engine off and park overnight.



*A frosty morning in Long Plain, Kosciuszko National Park.*

## Getting your shelter and sleep system ready

For snow camping, there are 3 main considerations for your shelter and sleep system. Taking the right gear for the conditions is essential for a safe and comfortable trip.

### Tent

Generally, three-season tents are used throughout spring, summer and autumn. They keep the rain out and offer plenty of ventilation but are not necessarily designed for winter use. Four-season tents use stronger pole geometries, additional guy ropes, and thicker fly materials to withstand stronger winds and snow load weighing down on top of the tent.




*My Marmot Fortress 3P is suitable for camping all year-round.*

### Mat

When selecting a sleeping mat, the R-value is a really useful guide to determine how well the mat will insulate you from the cold ground. Generally, an R-value of 4 or higher is sufficient for general winter camping, but for alpine camping, it's best to aim for an R-value of 6 or higher to ensure a comfortable night's rest.

These days, there are some great lightweight options for hikers offering high levels of insulation which is particularly great for multi-day winter in the alpine region. There are even more options for car-based campers, particularly with 10cm self-inflating mats available providing exceptional insulation.

 I pair my 4-season tent with the 9.5 R-value of Zempire's Monstamat Twin mat and use a down sleeping bag.

## Sleeping bag

Your personal preference will greatly influence which sleeping bag is right for you. Knowing I have experience with extreme conditions, many friends often ask me “what temperature sleeping bag do I need?”. It’s a tough question to answer and largely depends on what type of sleeper you are.

The Australian Alps rarely drop below an average of -4°C, although in 1991 Charlotte Pass along the Kosciusko Main Range, recorded an all-time low of -23°C!

My advice would be to not only use a winter sleeping bag with a comfort rating from -5°C to -10°C, but consider mix-and-matching by adding a sleeping bag liner, wearing thermals to bed, and popping on a beanie to keep your head warm. Having multiple layers means you can adjust each to ensure you’re not chilly but also not overheating. Sweat will create damp and cold conditions within your layers which at best would be uncomfortable and at worst, could be life-threatening.

 Using my MSR Whisperlite with Multi Fuel Bottle to prepare dinner in a High Country hut.

## Getting the food ready


### Fuel

Are you planning to use a gas canister stove?

The commonly found butane canisters stop working when the temperature is below zero degrees and the liquefied gas stops vaporising in the canister due to the cold temperature. Instead, look for *four-season* or *all-season* canisters which contain either propane, isobutane or a blend of both. It’s worth noting, however, that at really cold temperatures the different gasses in the canister will vaporise unevenly – if it’s too cold for butane or isobutane to burn, only the propane will be used and the canister may stop working even when it feels like it’s still half full of fuel.

### Stove

For the most reliable cooking in the snow, it’s definitely worth considering a liquid fuel stove. Hiking options like the MSR Whisperlite are well known for their robustness in alpine conditions, and once primed are exceptional cookers even on the coldest and windiest of days. Car-campers will find cookers running off LPG cylinders will work just fine in cold conditions.

 A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is essential for emergencies when camping in extreme conditions out of phone coverage.



## Keep safe and enjoy the High Country

Conditions in alpine regions can be unpredictable and hazardous. Even those with experience can struggle when temperatures plummet, and snowstorms hit with high winds and falling trees.

Parts of the High Country have weak to no mobile coverage and if you get caught in a bad situation without a signal, that situation can very quickly escalate. For your peace of mind, it's a good idea to carry a Personal Locator Beacon like ACR's ResQLink so you can raise the alarm and have the nearest emergency services notified.

Whether you're a hiker, skier or snowboarder, don't let the snow and winter chill stop you from camping - just be prepared with the right gear!

**What's your best tip for planning a snow camping trip away?**